Conflict and the structuring of character
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"Character-analytic theorists (e.g., Levy & Bleecker, 1975) have delineated the development of character in five stages: (1) *Self-affirmation* is the initial expression of the instinctual need." This is called primary narcissism, the stage/state in which all love (libidinal energy) is direct toward the physical/psychological self. "(2) The *negative environmental response* is the social environment's blocking or frustration of that need." Of course, not all environmental responses to expression of need are negative. When the instinctual need is gratified, the tension which the person feels is mostly related to the tension experienced with the build up of the need. E.g., a baby feeling hungry will experience a build up of tension (an increase of frequency and of intensity of neurological impulses going from stomach to brain) related to the body's need for food; this tension will build and urge the musculature toward discharge; the neurological intensity will be discharged through the musculature in such forms as whining, crying, reaching for the breast/food, etc. In such cases in which the tension to gratify the need is reduced by both the movement toward the fulfilling of the need and by the gratification of the need, the person experiences the transition from a state of well-being to a state of neurological/physiological arousal to a state of increased tension to an activity of discharge to a state of gratification and reuniting/rediscovery of the state of well-being. In this cycle the tension level does not build to the level which the organism will experience as "traumatic" because the build up and discharge of tension has occurred within the range of the normal and expectable experience for the organism. Temperament and physiology are the organismic determinants of the parameters for what is a normal and expectable experience of the cycle of need arousal-discharge-gratification. Response from the environment is the other determinant for establishing normal and expectable experience. "(3) The *organismic reaction* is the natural, "wired-in" response to frustration by the environment." The first level of "wired-in" response was mentioned above, i.e., the organism will discharge the build up of tension around the need by activating itself through its musculature in order to get its need met by direct action or by communication. The second level of "wired-in" response occurs when the first-level response is not gratified. It is a distress call; it signals that the organism is having to endure more tension than it can tolerate and it needs immediate response from the environment. The organism is losing contact with the state of well-being and with that loss comes loss of the sense of self that accompanies the state of well-being. This is experienced as distress. The third level of "wired-in" response is when the organism feels that its actual existence is threatened by the lack of response from the environment. This level of threat stimulates the survival center/power center and the response is rage (from the power center) and terror (from the heart center). The experience of this level of distress can be traumatic if no discharge through gratification occurs. "(4) The fourth stage is labeled *self-negation*. This more comprehensive form of turning against the self involves the individual's imitating the social environment in blocking the expression of the original instinctual impulse *and* blocking the instinctual response to that block as well. It is this identification with the environment that sets the person against himself, makes the block to self-expression internal, and creates psychopathology." When the first and second level of "wired-in" response are not gratified by the environment the organism enters the third level of response--extreme distress. The

organism still seeks discharge of tensions: neurological (hunger pangs), physiological (low blood sugar and organ distress), emotional (will I be responded to/ am I loved), and psychological (will I continue to exist, will I rediscover the sense of well-being and the sense of self that goes along with that sense of well-being). Without aid from the environment to discharge these tensions, the organism will resort to it own ways. The third level of wired-in response--rage and terror--will give way to resignation and hopelessness. This is seen in babies with 'failure to thrive' syndrome. This is also seen in self-negation in which the organism mobilizes its own libidinal energy against itself, hence the emergence of 'anti-libidinal' energy. This energy blocks both the instinctual energy and it blocks the 'wired-in' response to the blockage of that energy. At this level the organism is 'traumatized' on a neurological, physiological, emotional, and psychological level. A new cycle is now being established: the experiencing of instinctual need leads to the blocking of that need as well as to blocking of the feelings of frustration that the need is not being expressed and gratified. Psychic energy is now bound up in various strategies to block the impulse of the need and the feeling of frustration. In such a state, the organism cannot return to a state of well-being because the organism is holding tension used to block needs and holding tension from the need not being gratified. "The blocking on a body level is simply the organism's way of not experiencing the original need and the uncomfortable reaction to its frustration. Furthermore, the body blocks avoid the inevitable anxieties of being vulnerable again and risking the anticipated reinjury." This reinjury is experienced as an attack on primary narcissism, on full attention and love directed toward self. Injury to primary narcissism results in the development of secondary narcissism--the construction of a self that is more adaptive to the frustrating and denying environment. How the 'false self is constructed depends upon when in the person's development the frustration reaches traumatic intensity. The various personality structures are strategies constructed to help the person contain the painful affects arising out of a need not being met at a particular stage of development. While the body uses muscular tension as a means of blocking need and frustration, the mind uses mental operations to contain and block. In object relations theory, the person directs wishes for gratification of needs toward caregivers. The wish, need, instinctual impulse has an object of its desire. "When the objects (others) are frustrating or blocking, the individual internalizes them and then renders them unconscious." The person then uses these internalized bad objects within the strategy of blocking psychologically and emotionally original impulses, frustration, and anger at the frustration. The psychic energy that would be directed toward the external objects (caregivers) is now directed toward the internalized objects. Once the psychic operation of redirecting psychic energy from the external object to the internal one is completed, the experience of the operation is forgotten and goes into the unconscious. This is the process of traumatization. The internal operation of internalization creates a corresponding change in behavior toward external objects. Thwarted in forming attachment to the external object, the psychic energy of attachment is redirected toward the internal object. Further, when the 'bad object" is internalized it is internalized along with the wish attached to the external object, namely, that it will gratify. Hence, the internalized 'bad object' also has located within it a 'good part' which holds the wish. The psychic energy that would have attached to the external 'good enough' object is redirected toward the 'bad object' that contains its 'frustrating/bad part' as well as the potential for activating its 'gratifying/good part.' Change in external behavior or internal operations " is resisted not only because it may cause

the resurrection of internalized 'bad objects' and repressed impulse toward them--an intolerable psychic state that motivated repression in the first place--but also because of the individual's attachment to these objects as internalized." To lose the internalized 'bad object' is also to lose the potential for good in the object. "It is above all the need of the child for the parents, however bad they may appear to him, that compels him to internalize bad objects; and it is because this need remains attached to them in the unconscious that he cannot bring himself to part with them. (Fairbairn)."

(5) "The fifth and final step in the sequence, labeled the *adjustment process*, essentially consists of making the best of it. This involves the construction of any number of compromises in an attempt to resolve the unresolvable conflict." These compromises are strategies employed to (a)contain the affects which arose in the *self-negating process* and (b) compensate for what was lost.

"The self-negation process defines what the individual must deny or suppress. The adjustment process defines what he must exaggerate. What part of the real self the individual suppresses and what parts he exaggerates succinctly define his character as discussed here. Psychopathology is seen in the suppression, in the exaggeration, or most often, in the individual's natural reaction to this kind of habitual, unnatural accommodation to avoid pain while maintaining contact."